Tips for success: Working with community partners

There are many benefits when organizations partner: shared workload and costs, recognition for all, a greater pool of expertise on which everyone can draw, enhanced networks, the potential for extra funding, and expanded reach. Challenges may arise, as well: divergent goals can exist or emerge over time, and communications can break down.

Gaining a brief overview of the environment in which teams operate can go a long way in helping you foster effective relationships with and between your sites. The goal for you in learning about your partners is to understand where needs and goals align, and where conflict may arise. It can also help you to be a cheerleader for your partners about the collective power they're creating by building this new community.

Learning about your partners:

- Deliverables: what do their various funding sources require?
- Resources: what sort of tools, funds, and political leverage, professional and/or community connections do they bring to the table?
- Service area(s): where do they serve?
- Target audience: who do they want to reach?

Qualities of effective partnerships:

- Written agreements about expectations, responsibilities, and timeline are created and shared (e.g., who will do what, when)
- Time exists for trust to develop
- There is open sharing of information about performance measures, practice lists, population-level data, patient information at the practice level
- Regular opportunities to meet and communicate are built into the agenda

Potential Partners

At the state level:

- Departments of health
- Medicaid programs
- CHIP programs
- Quality improvement organizations (QIOs)

At the regional level:

- Insurers
- Hospitals and health systems
- Regional Extension Centers
- Professional societies
- AHECs
- Hospital-based health educators (e.g., certified diabetes educators)

At the local level:

- Tobacco cessation organizations
- Weight Watchers
- Housing agencies
- Transportation initiatives
- Food banks
- Agencies on Aging
- Schools and school nurses
- Workforce training programs
- Pharmaceutical companies

Authors: Darren DeWalt, Pat Bricker, Bob Gabbay

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